

## Matthew Shepard Story

### Oral History- Bob Beck

- Subject: Bob Beck
- Occupation: News Director, Wyoming Public Radio
- Interviewer: Mark Junge
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- Producer and Transcriber: – Sue Castaneda

The following interview is part of the Wyoming oral history series titled the "Matthew Shepard Story." It is produced by Sue Castaneda for the Wyoming State Archives. The interviewer is Wyoming oral historian Mark Junge. The entire project is funded by the Wyoming Cultural Trust Fund. In this segment, we interview Bob Beck--long time interviewer for Wyoming Public Radio.

**BOB BECK:** I'm Bob Beck--News director of Wyoming Public Radio. In 1998 I was the news director Wyoming Public radio. I've been here since 1988.

**MARK JUNGE:** You were the first on the scene for the news department for the Matthew Shepard story?

**BOB BECK:** Yes. It's kind of hard to explain. I had heard about it on... I want to say a Wednesday. I believe the murder was on a Tuesday night/Wednesday morning kind of deal. Thursday morning I heard this event had happened--that they had found this young man who had been beaten pretty badly and I started getting other calls about it from people. But the main person who called me was a student of mine. I was teaching that afternoon and he had to miss class. That student's name was Phil LeBree. He said one of his best friends had been seriously beaten up and I would probably hear about it later. It would probably be a news item. I said to Phil... what was funny about Phil was that he was one of these guys who ducked classes a lot and I thought this was another excuse (laughs). I said, "Well why don't you turn in your assignment and then maybe you can go deal with your friend?" As it turned out, something nagged me and then I got another call about it so I called the Sheriff's Department and they said they were going to have a press conference at like 3 p.m. that afternoon. I had a class at 2 p.m. so I did the

class and then ran over and met my intern at 3 o'clock over there. That's when they made the announcement that they had made an arrest and that this had happened. They did not arrest the second person--Aaron McKinney--yet but they knew where he was. He was at Poudre Valley (Hospital, Fort Collins, Co.) "We are continuing to investigate." And that's when they began to describe what had happened. Gary Puls-- he was the Sheriff--in his opinion gave us the details.

**MARK JUNGE:** You're a seasoned newsperson. Was this out of the ordinary for you? Did it strike you as anything significant?

**BOB BECK:** It did because Gary, on that very day, basically called it a "hate crime." We were unfamiliar with hate crimes here. I don't ever remember hearing about one. Then there were some circumstances that he mentioned that day. He said, explaining the bike rider who found Matt against the fence, he said that he originally thought he was a scarecrow... that he was tied up like a scarecrow. I remember us all asking, "Well, what does that mean?" Gary-- it turns out later--I don't think he had been to the scene but he gave us this kind of "Christ like" pose that turned out to be a pretty big image because once that story got out the national media was racing here within the next 24 hours. So, he called it a hate crime and he described the image of him being tied up like a scarecrow like you saw in the "Wizard of Oz." It was a big local story for us. Actually, we don't do a ton of murders, Mark, but because of the circumstances behind this. Sure this was something we were interested in doing so yeah, it got our attention. I never thought beyond the borders. I thought it was just a big local story although the Denver television stations were there too.

**MARK JUNGE:** Plus, he was a student at the University there too.

**BOB BECK:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. But the hate crime thing... I can't even tell you of another one I knew of in Wyoming at that time so that really did strike us as interesting. And that was right after the dragging in Jasper--probably a couple of months.

**MARK JUNGE:** The dragging of whom?

**BOB BECK:** In Jasper, Texas.<sup>1</sup> I saw one of the killers was just on the news this last week.

**MARK JUNGE:** Oh was it?

**BOB BECK:** One of the killers was executed.

**MARK JUNGE:** So you had no idea of the morass out there. You had no idea what this was going to come to?

**BOB BECK:** No idea. No idea. The first time I knew... I did some local reporting and then on Friday I started getting some calls about it... people not only from around the state... I know a lot of people because I been on a lot of boards that deal with the media across the country and I was getting calls from buddies from all over. And then we went to the preliminary hearing which was the next day and they brought Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney and Chastity Pasley<sup>2</sup> in. The other woman (Kristen Price)<sup>3</sup> was charged but they didn't bring her in. But they brought those three in. We used to have this

little room in the courthouse—it was actually quite small. It was standing room only. It was packed so they moved us upstairs to the court. But that's when you finally got a sense of "Wow! A lot of people are here and from everywhere." The New York Times, magazines, television stations... a lot of people showed up within 24 hours to cover this. And that began this crazy weekend. Even more came that night and Saturday and Sunday. It just became this mob scene for the next week or so but especially that weekend. It was crazy! And what was crazy, Mark, was that was homecoming week here at UW (University of Wyoming). You're dealing with that. You're dealing with this horrific murder that you just heard about and are trying to get the facts straight because unfortunately with "pack journalism" there's a lot of misinformation out there so you're trying to focus on what is right and what's not so right. And there was a lot of "what's not so right" in that story. And then I also had some duties that involved the football game so was just a really crazy... Saturday was really crazy in particular because I was doing some NPR stories. I was doing some freelancing for the football game. It's amazing I didn't give a score on one of those news items because there was just so much to juggle. One of our reporters was up in Riverton at a debate. There were two debates that weekend. At that time, there were only three of us in the newsroom so the two were here and our intern—we were actually going crazy. We had other interns too and they were helping with the story. It was just a matter of getting out and talking to people who knew this kid, what happened, who knew these other guys and actually we were able to find people that knew everyone. I think our first NPR story was on a Saturday night. Then we did something on Sunday and I think we did something on Monday... maybe even Tuesday. It was just crazy—we were on the network all that week.

**MARK JUNG:** Were you then besieged by national news people besides having to structure the interview process for the crime?

**BOB BECK:** No. I was a guest a lot. I was on MSNBC that Saturday morning. I recall I was on Channel 9 in Denver. You know, you get these questions that were just insane like "It probably happens a lot there." "Well,...no, it doesn't. It's the first one I've ever dealt with. You would get a lot of... nobody else outside of Laramie seem to be the surprise of this kind of thing could happen. You try and explain that in town a lot of people are upset and offended and that this is something that a lot of people are not taking very lightly and so you're trying to describe that. Even in Denver, somebody said that. I actually snapped at one of the reporters who asked really a bad question. I said, "Well, it's not like the 16th Street Mall where people are getting beaten up every week." I mean, I shot back at them. But then I realized now I'm in the position of defending my community and that's not positive and it can make me look biased and so I just stopped doing those interviews.

**MARK JUNG:** What was the media's perception? Now, the media... Colorado media, national media, may be West Coast media if you could classify that... what was their perception did you find of Wyoming and Laramie?

**BOB BECK:** You know, right away nobody was really shocked the something like this could happen here. They figured we were all a bunch of cowboys and probably would pull gay people off the street and beat them to death whenever you had the opportunity so there was a lot of that attitude. We were obviously stupider than they are. A very arrogant attitude about the town. A lot of classic interviews where they

went into bars to find colorful people. As someone who is been in the media long time, as someone who cares very deeply about work that I do...it was very disturbing especially on the television side. It was a very quick "hit" type of story. There was no real context which we've come to expect. It was basically "find some characters in town" and drive the perception that they were interested and that this horrible crime happened in this backward place and who could be surprised by this?

**MARK JUNGE:** How did you structure your investigation or your investigatory interviews?

**BOB BECK:** it was hard because the county attorney at the time--Cal Rerucha who quickly put the clamps on the release of a lot of information. Part of that was because of that initial press conference by the sheriff. I think he saw that as inflammatory. I think he wanted to control the story but the county attorney was trying to be as factual as he could. So suddenly they stopped giving a lot of information but what we did was--what we found was that there were a lot of people who wanted to talk to us. "Doc" wanted to talk to us. He was the landlord for at least Aaron McKinney...

**MARK JUNGE:** Who was this?

**BOB BECK:** Doc. I can't recall his real name. (O'Connor) He was in the movie. Steve Buscemi 4 plays him. I never knew him. He was kind of a local character who was around and had the unique situation of knowing both Matthew Shepard and the murderers and so he was making himself available to everybody. Mr. McKinney (Aaron's father) -- I think his name was Bill-- he was making some kind of arrangement with the media and they wanted to tell their son's story -- Aaron's story. That he was abused and that the reason that he might have done something like this was that the young man (Matthew) might've hit on him. That message was actually spun pretty quickly so. From our standpoint we were also getting a lot of student reaction on campus but we also found people who knew Matt Shepherd and who had been around Matt Shepherd. He had been at a meeting that night and so we were digging through those people and talking to them. It was actually pretty easy to find out about Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney because they had been in the criminal justice system before and they grew up in Laramie and people knew them. We had to go find--and we were finally successful in finding people that grew up with Shepherd in Casper and knew of him at the University. And then there were some other gay students and folks that we are able to find. People made themselves available actually very quickly. That did change, maybe in a week, as people got tired of doing interviews. I would say in the first 48 to 72 hours it was not hard to find anybody. My students know students. My intern-- and this is kind of an odd situation--as we were walking back from the initial press conference on the Thursday she said, "I need to tell you something." I said, "What?" She said, "I know them." "You know the murderers?" "Yes, I know them very well. I had driven them both home." She had worked at the Fireside. She'd actually driven them both home from the bar the week before. I said, "Really?" At that point I decided she really probably shouldn't play much of a role in the story just because there is a potential conflict there but she did help. She was an anchor because she was that good so we let her do that. That was pretty interesting. So you realize what kind of a small town this is. I realized I knew Aaron McKinney and I knew Aaron McKinney's mother who had recently died. I knew his stepfather and other people.

**MARK JUNGE:** How did you perceive those two before this incident? Did your perception of them change after the incident—the two killers?

**BOB BECK:** I saw a picture of them that they handed us and they had actually cut their hair. They look like skinheads was my initial reaction. I didn't know that they were as small as they were until I actually saw them up close. My first perception of them when I actually saw them was--and it wasn't positive—I didn't realize how little Matthew Shepard was but I was just amazed the two guys their size could of done this because it just didn't seem... I mean it just looked like people that you could have bought off. Then I didn't realize that he was as little as he was too. So they were apparently little guys who usually got their rear ends beaten by people that they would challenge and this year was an individual that couldn't fend them off. Henderson was somebody that I did not know but it turned out I might have known people associated with him. McKinney, like I said, I knew his mom. I remember him as kind of a little jerk actually because he used to come to the Laramie Athletic Club. His mom had died probably year or two before this happened. She was married to a guy (Randy Timothy) whose on-air name was "K.W. Graybow". He was a radio DJ and program director here in Laramie. I used to see him a lot in the courthouse. I would say, "Geez, what are you doing here?" He would say, "It's my stepson. He keeps getting in trouble." So he would be there in juvenile court frequently kind of waiting on the proceedings to take place so I was familiar that this was not a great kid. So when I saw him in the courtroom I thought that I knew who he was. I remember him as being a little kid--"AJ" I think they called him. I knew his mom really well because his mom used to date a friend of mine so it's just kind of a small town.

**MARK JUNGE:** This is kind of a generic question, Bob, but when you're doing an investigation and you're setting up a schedule of interviews how do you keep from preempting or interfering with the law enforcement that is trying to conduct interviews?

**BOB BECK:** I don't ever worry about it. I guess I don't ever think about it. We just do what we do.

**MARK JUNGE:** You just seek the facts?

**BOB BECK:** Yeah. They give you information on what they have already and you just kind of go from there. We knew we were going to do a feature so we would need a lot of content plus people are going to want to know "Who are these guys and who is this kid that got killed? How did this happen?" And there weren't a lot of those facts that we got right away like how this happened in great detail. I don't remember that being true. I do remember when they filed charges against them we got copies of those charging documents and that was the first taste of things but I don't think we knew a ton of actual inside information until the case went to what you would call a "preliminary hearing" where they bring in witnesses and that sort of thing. That was a little bit later. I think we learned some information on that. For instance-- how he was tied up was a little bit different than what we had been told. It's funny because that was an image that have been out in the public for at least two weeks--standing up like a scarecrow when he was actually on the ground. It doesn't really make any difference I suppose but there's an image that got out around the country that made this sound a little bit more horrific-- like he was crucified or something like that. Just how he was found and stuff like that--I had never spoken to the bike rider until later.

**MARK JUNG:** Did you have access to McKinney and Henderson for interviews?

**BOB BECK:** No, they make them off-limits. One interview occurred with McKinney and this was a year later so it'd been one year before anybody actually spoke to him. It'd been a call that I think he generated too. Remember that intern that I told you that he knew--she went and worked for a commercial station in Cheyenne. Apparently there was a young man who'd been let out of jail--he arranged it, got phone numbers and got back to McKinney. McKinney made the phone call. This guy was let out early and they put them back in jail is my understanding because there was a gag order on the case. They tried to subpoena her. They were real big on payback if you broke the rules. You know you just kind had to blow off law enforcement and do what you needed to do and just deal with it. Sometimes that happens.

**MARK JUNG:** What was the most dynamic interview that you had? Do you remember?

**BOB BECK:** In the entire time early on?

**MARK JUNG:** Let's just say the entire time.

**BOB BECK:** I liked an interview that I did with the woman who used to be the director of the youth crisis center in Laramie. It was actually that I like the story a lot. And her name... I don't even remember her name... I think Loretta was her name. Aaron McKinney had spent time at the youth crisis center. What my story was about was that these guys had been in the juvenile justice system and our juvenile courts and obviously, we didn't do a good job because they ended up being nationally-known murderers. Laramie at that time is trying to distance themselves from these kids. "They're not one of us. They are different." Well, in fact they were and you raised them and you didn't handle their indiscretions properly and now you get to this situation. They had a progression where they did here in they did here and they had robbed a store and all this stuff and nothing had ever happened. Then you get to the point were you have this horrific murder so maybe they thought this was okay. You know, they were heavily involved with meth and nobody was doing anything about that. So, I was doing a story on that and she (Loretta) was really the best interview. She was really very critical of how the system worked and then I got other people who are very critical of how the system worked. It turned out to be a really good story that I don't think anybody else did. I was very pleased with it but the interview with her was very good because she gave a real insight to what he (McKinney) was like as a young man. Interviews with Rob DeBree are always good. Early on he was good because he gave you a sense of what they were looking at. I would say Mark that I am not sure that I was really excited by that many interviews. I think the content itself was compelling. But I don't know that anybody--even some of the gay folks--were all that great. It was kind of like a big "thing." It wasn't like some of the other cases I had where you really do have a great person that stands out. It was just kind of a big bunch of content. The hardest part about covering that case--at least initially--was getting accurate information and making sure that you weren't telling a missed truth. I remember a phone call that I got on that Saturday right after it happened at the football game from NPR. They said, "Your governor (Gov. Jim Geringer<sup>5</sup>) is calling for a hate crime legislation in your state." I said, "No, he's not." They said, "No, no, he is." "No! He's not! Wherever you got that, it's wrong." They said, "It's on the Associated Press wire." He apparently did an interview." I

said, "That's mistaken. I've covered this guy and this legislature for too long. He has testified against it." And then I said, "Hey! Hold on a second!" This was like something out of "Annie Hall." "He's actually in the press box. Let me go get him." So I walked down there and got him and put them on the phone and he explained that he isn't actually calling for it. So they said, "Okay, would you get an interview with him and have him say what he said." I said I would be delighted to but that is just an example that there was all this stuff on the air and there was a pretty good chance that it was wrong. The AP was getting the stuff out of the Denver papers. They had their own reporter who was doing a great job but then they were also getting this other content elsewhere and...

**MARK JUNG:** As I recall... Jason Marsden<sup>6</sup> from the Casper Star (Tribune) covered it, right?

**BOB BECK:** He wrote a column. I don't think he was here. The guy who covered it for the Casper Star was Kerry Drake.

**MARK JUNG:** I remember Kerry. So what is your estimate--as you look back now--it's been 13 years. What is your perspective?

**BOB BECK:** I can tell you that at the time it was probably the most stressful thing that I had ever done. I would still say that. A close second would be "Remembering the Eight"; because I was out at the crash site and then sitting in the courtroom with those eight families and their victim impact statements which was pretty horrific. That was the worst day as a reporter that I had ever had. As a total thing, it was like being in a war zone. It was very stressful. It was hard to pay attention. We had to do a lot of stuff for the network and for ourselves. That was hard. We had to get the facts. Things are moving very quickly. You had actually not leave the media room because you never knew when things weren't going to be just announced randomly so you had to cover that. There is a lot of standing around doing nothing too. It was just a very difficult time. Plus, you're dealing with the emotions of "this is really unique, horrific murder for Wyoming." I have maybe one heard of one crime since then that even matches up with it--the rape up in Casper a year or so ago was pretty bad but I would still put this ahead of it. When you know the facts--how he was tied up and just continually beaten--I don't know as a person how you couldn't be affected by it. You're watching your town react to it. You're seeing your town being portrayed in a certain way so you are impacted. You say that you're not impacted but you are. And your state is being portrayed in a certain way. At the same time, you're working really long hours trying to get the story right covering a lot of trials, a lot of hearings, getting as many emotions as you can. You're trying to scoop everybody else and not get scooped. There was a lot to it and I never realized until I was interviewed for a book a couple of years later that I couldn't shut up.

**MARK JUNG:** Was that Beth Loffreda's<sup>8</sup> book?

**BOB BECK:** Yes and I remember that she probably talked to me for about 90 minutes and I couldn't shut up because this was the first time that I talked about it. I always thought it was just me--that I was like a wimp or something but we did a special on the 10 year anniversary and I thought it might be interesting to hear what other reporters had to say so we had Kerry and Rob Black who was working for AP. They said what I said. Heather Feeney--who worked for me at the time--she got out of journalism because of this case. That's the other part of it. I was also teaching then and you're watching the media work the

way that it does--pack journalism--which I had seen before but it was disturbing and you don't like it so that bothers you a little bit too. There were a lot of things that weren't right. You saw people trying to manipulate you a little bit. I can remember a very crazy press conferences with one of the gay groups. They were trying to talk about how these guys had this plan to take away his dignity because he was gay. And my reaction was, "You know, Beavis & Butthead committed this crime." They were going to roll him. I never believed that these guys were never going to do anything other than potentially hurt him and take his money and it probably went further than he had anticipated. I do not believe that they thought they would kill him that night when they left the bar. I think it just transpired as they drove out into the street.

**MARK JUNG:** Did it turn out that they were high on drugs?

**BOB BECK:** I was told that they were not. They had indicated that they had done meth earlier in the day and they were drinking which is a bad combination as I have learned. But I've understood that the toxicology tests that they were. That's the million-dollar question. They were certainly well-known for meth. I think the one thing that has always been interesting for me is listening to Aaron McKinney do a recent television interview and remembering what he said on the tape when they first arrested him. He had never admitted to ever knowing Matthew Shepard or even having seen him before. He said it was "possible" and yet there been a lot of stories out there portraying they were in a drug deal gone bad or they were this, they were that. I've never seen what the facts are. In my opinion--here you have two guys who are known criminals. They have a history of doing things and here's a little feminine guy. He's got a lot of money--they can tell. "This is somebody we can roll." I guess in the original court documents that Rerucha drew up suggested that they were gay and not how they got them out there. I think that's what they said. That makes sense to me I guess. The thing that is always troubled me, Mark, is I don't know why he ever gotten to that car. I just don't know why you would do that but he did. Some people would say, "Well, they did know each other." Nobody really knows for sure and that will always be one of the troubling aspects of this case.

**MARK JUNG:** There was talk about premeditation at the trial.

**BOB BECK:** Oh yeah, about him reaching over and grabbing somebody's equipment.

**MARK JUNG:** Yeah.

**BOB BECK:** I have been told by people that knew Aaron McKinney that that is actually plausible. He was molested as a child and he equated molesters with gay people. So, I think in his mind he was molested by a gay person which we all know probably was not the case. It was just a molester. So if they pretended to be gay maybe there is a romantic move being made by someone and then he snapped. That is essentially what he said happened. That's what his dad said happened and that's what his attorney said happened. What you don't know is-- was that a scam to try to get yourself a reduced sentence thinking maybe somebody would understand that? It was a crazy defense though.

**MARK JUNG:** Was his story consistent throughout the trial?



**BOB BECK:** His always was and in fact I have never heard that ever get countered by him. He's done limited interviews but I've never heard that. I've never heard him ever say or Henderson ever say that they ever knew him before. I've never heard those two ever dispute the facts of what happened. The only thing I've ever heard before that was up for debate was what part Russell Henderson played in this murder. Russell Henderson was an Eagle Scout and there were apparently very intricate knots and how he was tied up against the fence which would lead me to believe that he was certainly involved in tying him up. And, he had blood all over his shoes which would lead you to believe he was close enough to witness the beating. You know, the thing with him was that he said it was all Aaron McKinney. Aaron McKinney was willing to take the blame for it all to try to get his buddy off but the judge wasn't buying it. They both got two life sentences.

**MARK JUNGE:** Were the verdicts for these two guys anti-climactic for you? Was the pro forma just to cover the trial?

**BOB BECK:** No, it wasn't because we did think there was a good chance Aaron McKinney was going to get the death penalty. See, Henderson cut a deal and he pled guilty. He didn't go to trial so he gets two life sentences. McKinney was going to fight it. So he gets convicted and we went into the death penalty phase. It actually started and we had taken a break and when we came back they had decided to drop the death penalty charges and he was just going to go to prison.

**MARK JUNGE:** That didn't take long to determine, did it?

**BOB BECK:** No. It was actually pretty quick. Mrs. Shepard will tell you that she just didn't want to go any further. I've heard interesting points made by scholars that it probably wouldn't have been an execution because they probably mistakenly went forward with it because...

**MARK JUNGE:** Have you met the Shepards?

**BOB BECK:** Oh yeah, I've interviewed them. He (Dennis Shepard) has not done an interview with me but he was there when I interviewed Judy the last time. We actually had a very nice conversation. I've interviewed Judy Shepard probably five times maybe. The last time was right here in our studio. Only one of them has ever been face-to-face. We've talked about hate crime issues, we've talked about the murder, we talked about the hate crime legislation that's come up recently in Wyoming the last couple of years...

**MARK JUNGE:** Cathy Connolly's<sup>9</sup> introduction of the bill to allow gay marriage? Is that it?

**BOB BECK:** No, it was actually an anti-gay marriage bill three or four years ago. We talked about that ...which keeps coming back but...and then whatever happens-- the hate crime bill in Congress in these types of things. Then I had a really good interview with her on the 10-year anniversary and Dennis came over with her the weekend they were honoring that. It was the day Larry Birleffi<sup>10</sup> died. I remember that.

**MARK JUNGE:** So, what do you think about hate crime legislation?

**BOB BECK:** I thought it would've been a good thing for Wyoming to have done. It probably wouldn't have done a ton. One of things it would've done is that it would have documented how many of these cases happened. I had never heard of any. After this happened you started hearing more about these incidences because they started getting reported. You know, I don't know what harm it would've done to do something like this. I think it would've been a nice statement for the state to have made--especially when you were here covering and saw all of the crap that the state got for a number of things. I think a more significant move though was domestic partner insurance that the University just recently did. Whether the state would continue with that would be interesting to watch. And that going a lot of different areas. I mean--that could go boyfriend/girlfriend. I think that's interesting. I think it's interesting to watch how many people--maybe even the majority--but I don't know--how people view gays and lesbians. They are much more tolerant than before. I don't think anyone ever thought about it before. I remember having a statewide call-in show after this happened. We just did it. I remember getting calls from all over the state and it was interesting to hear people's reactions. We had some people that were very "you know, this kid got what he deserved." We did have some of that. That certainly was not the majority of the conversation. I think maybe people sort of examined their beliefs and took a closer look at them. Things would be just fine if your next door neighbor was gay, lesbian or something like that. I've seen that attitude change. I've even seen a change of the political level. We are probably about 15 years from everything being okay but the reason people are pushing really hard for this legislation is I think they see what I see. The attitude has changed so they're trying to scare everyone. On campus, I can remember having discussions about this in my classroom--they were journalist "wannabe's" and communications people who just wanted to talk about it and so we did. People wanted to talk about this and so we did. And I became quickly aware that there were two or three people in my class who were gay and you could tell by their reaction that they were extremely uncomfortable with this. But people spoke out--and I would say even then at least two thirds of the class just thought "This is insane. Why would anyone target him?" This surprised me a little bit. Yet I think you get the same reaction today if not more. I mean I think I could see classes today where there were would be 100%.

**MARK JUNG:** Do you think it's a generational thing?

**BOB BECK:** Absolutely. And I think what has happened is that you've seen TV shows portray gay and lesbian people in a very positive sense. I think you've seen people who are famous who are gay or lesbian and nobody seems to be threatened by that. I think that that has changed a lot of things. I think more and more people coming out has made a difference. I think even here in little old Wyoming--and I'm not going to say in every town--were probably going to be a little bit more tolerant in some of our towns than others but I also think that is changing. We have people that I know to be gay and I've known for a long time and for whatever reason they're still very uncomfortable about coming out and that is too bad. But we are getting there.

**MARK JUNG:** Beth Loffreda in her book--and I'm paraphrasing--but it seems to me that she was intimating that look, although we consider ourselves to be the Equality State we consider ourselves and "live and let live" state. If you are too different you're noticed and you are well... proscribed. She said one of the things that was interesting to her was that when she interviewed a girl who was Latino/black

this interviewee said that she was afraid for her life after this event took place. But a downtown businessman, per se, might think that this is just an anomaly. This is not who we are. But Beth was saying it just depends on who you are as to how this affects you.

**BOB BECK:** Beth had a conference that she got to oversee that was a broad conference of English scholars from across the country. At that conference, they decided to show a documentary that somebody had made on this event... on the trials mostly and the murder. I just happened to be sitting near the back near these women and a couple of them I guess were lesbians from Boston. They were talking about how afraid they were to come out here. I look at them and said, "You know I was just in Boston and I got off at the wrong stop on the subway. I'm sure that more danger could've potentially happened to me in your subway where I got off than will ever happened to you in Laramie, Wyoming. Why would you think a little town like this is going to be more dangerous than there?" It was just very interesting to hear their perspective. I lived in the city for a while and I have lived here and I'll take my chances anywhere in Wyoming as opposed to maybe wandering on the wrong block in Chicago or Boston or New York. I was wondering on the wrong block in New York with my girlfriend actually had a taxicab driver stop and get us one. It was back in the Cabrini Green<sup>11</sup> days. These urban kids... These idiots... "Uh... young man. Get in the cab." (Laughs)

**MARK JUNG:** The same thing happened to me and my sister and her girlfriend in uptown Harlem near the Apollo Theater. We wanted to see the Apollo Theater. This guy says, "What are you doing? But I think what Beth was trying to express-- and I think she did a very well was that she was trying to express her sensitivity to those people who maybe are affected. If you are straight or businessman we can talk to each other and say, "I don't know what the hell the problem is!"

**BOB BECK:** It's the same way in race. I remember playing games me on the south side of the whole crowd was black. It was the first time I'd ever experienced that. "I think I'll stay real close to the team here." But it was a great experience--we had an African-American basketball coach and he used to like to expose us to things like that and it was good for us and it was good for me later in life. I mean, if you're Jewish and everybody around you isn't you're going to feel a little bit uncomfortable there too. It's not just in the gay lesbian thing. It's hard to be different!

**MARK JUNG:** How has this whole Shepard case impacted your life?

**BOB BECK:** It impacted me in a lot of ways. It impacted me as a reporter--just being accurate and just learning from "pack journalism." Learning how to properly approach a story and not to have preconceived ideas about what the messages are that you're presenting to your audience. Kind of let it portray itself and go from there. Don't take a position. I mean, a story like that-- just cover it. It was plenty compelling enough. It impacted me in that I still think about it. Not as much as I used to even five or six years ago. There are times when I'm in the courthouse here that I will remember "Oh yeah, I had to stand outside on the lawn on this day" or maybe I have a bad memory of just sitting in the courtroom. They put the clamps on information so that was kind of stressful and dealing with some of the fights that we had to which are absolutely silly. I remember funny odd things from that too. I was with Wyatt Skaggs who is the public defender for Russell Henderson. We are standing at the bottom... it used to be

the base over the County Court was... and the national media thought they had seen one of the girlfriends. We were all downstairs and one of them thought that they saw one of the girlfriends walking up to the courthouse and they wanted to get some shots (photos) so they all ran up the stairs and they ran into each other and fell down the stairs. It was just a very amusing scene. Wyatt looked at me and said, "And some people think attorneys are bad." (They laugh) I thought, "Oh, good line. I have to give you that one." I was on national television and a national magazine twice for odd circumstances. Once, I was standing behind the murderers because there are so many people in the courtroom. I had a couple of officers who know me who just told me to come and stand with them. So here's the shot in Newsweek with me standing right behind them on the cover of the magazine. I mean, that's my big claim to fame. I used to always park next to Mr. McKinney (Aaron McKinney's father) over by a church that's about a block away from the courthouse and a park there every day at the same place. I just got to walking... he knew I sat behind him and he remembered me interviewing him once. My aunt called me up and said, "I saw you on ABC tonight because you are walking with the dad of the murderer." So, that was amusing. It still affects me because I get very upset about it. It was a very terrible crime. You can't sit down with Judy Shepard and not remember that whole event. I knew people who are part of the EMT crew who went out there and their description of what he looked like. It was just beyond horrific. I was terrified we were going to see those pictures because there were pictures taken and they were saving them for the death penalty phase. I was totally psyched out that we were going to have to look at those pictures and luckily we didn't have to see them. But, you saw enough of him bandaged up. But just to think of these good people (Dennis and Judy Shepard)--they're sending their son off to college and what they had to go through. All those things just stir your emotions. I've never had a compelling feeling to interview--maybe initially I did--to interview McKinney or Henderson. I don't know that I would ask anything all that great and I would ponder why I was doing it. I stopped... or, I used to ride my mountain bike or run out that way on that trail where he was found and I never went there again. Whenever I'm over there by Wal-Mart I think about that. I still think about 13 or 14 years later.

**MARK JUNG:** If I was you and I had a chance to interview and I would want to know what kind of person he was. How did he grow up? Why does he feel the way he does?

**BOB BECK:** I knew that. I knew his mom and I knew kind of where they were from. I guess what I would like to go back and revisit maybe the drug thing-I can see if maybe my thinking on the thing is correct.

**MARK JUNG:** How you know if he is going to tell you the truth?

**BOB BECK:** I don't know. The one thing I've always said is that it's important to believe the murderers and if the murderers stuck to the same story what have they got to lose? They are in for two life sentences anyway. You would think that maybe they would enjoy a visitor or maybe like to chat.

**MARK JUNG:** Well, I tried and they both said no.

**BOB BECK:** I think they realize that maybe talking is not been all that useful.

**MARK JUNG:** What you think, Bob is the relative significance of this event in Wyoming history, national history and the total scheme of things? How does it rank? Where is it placed?

**BOB BECK:** If you ask people where Laramie, Wyoming was, it used to be that people would remember that "Oh, that's where Matthew Shepard was murdered." Every person I've ever hired or tried to hire and brought out here--eventually they kind of bring it up. "Where did that happen?" You get a lot of that. I would say 90% of the people I've hired have brought it up or were curious about it. It's a significant event in our history whether we like it or not. I think it's less than it was. Certainly, right after it everybody remembered. But I remember Jasper, Texas to as I told you earlier. I remember the name of that place but I couldn't show you where it is on a map. I know that that happened there. We asked some reporters WNYC to go out on the streets of New York and talk to people about what happened here and they all knew about it. It's a very significant event in Wyoming history. It's something that is not going to go away but at the same time the image could be so improved with not passing what might be viewed as hateful legislation, not passing something that's taking away people's rights. Maybe there are ways to go forward from this and put a nice positive spin on it. It would help somebody would be bright enough to do

**MARK JUNG:** I see this to as being a very significant event in gay liberation, if that's what you want to call it. I don't know how you feel about it but I'd be interested to know.

**BOB BECK:** I know Judy Shepard has dedicated herself to making this a significant event in the liberation for gay-rights and has tried very hard to make this a positive event as best she can, which, I admire her to no end. I think it is still possible I get concerned when I sit in the legislature and I hear some things that just don't seem as positive as you would like to hear and sometimes silence says a lot too. I get disturbed that we still have to fight off some ideas of taking away rights from gays and lesbians--especially gay and lesbian couples. Maybe I'm unaware but I haven't seen any crime statistics go up because of gay lesbian couples. I'm not aware the gay and lesbian couples have contributed negatively to our society in any potential way--certainly in Wyoming. For people to suggest otherwise, I would like to see the facts. So you have to hear that for the last three or four years and it gets disturbing and tells me that we have a long way to go. Yet, at the same time, Laramie elected an openly gay legislator who is gaining some prominence by the way even regionally. Other people might even say that they could run and do the same sort of thing. That is helpful. We had a gay mayor in Casper (Guy Padgett<sub>12</sub>). There were some other people who are very well thought of and respected you've been able to come out but were still a little ways away. I don't know the Wyoming is any worse than any other state. That or I can only pay attention to what is going on here. And you would hope that maybe in the next decade maybe we wouldn't have to worry about this but... you know, whether he was gay or maybe even if he was involved in drugs which is what everybody speculates this was just a horrific crime! You are always going to be impacted by something that is this terrible. Sixteen or however many times it was with the 357 Magnum...when you see how big a 357 Magnum is you realize probably only two or three pops in the head probably would've done the trick. Just to think about that over and over and over again is beyond brutal. It's hard to fathom.

**MARK JUNG:** Very well spoken. That was a leading question. It seems to me that regardless of the crime and regardless of who Matthew Shepard was that he has become something beyond--way beyond something in terms of representation of those who suffer and he suffered like Christ on the cross as you just mentioned--the image of Christ on the cross. And here he is a suffering individual and I don't deny

that the parents and he suffered... I know they did but I think personally, for me, this goes beyond Wyoming. This is like something significant in the field of human rights.

**BOB BECK:** I think there's no doubt about it. Everybody knows about him and he is a symbol. He is a name that people know he is a brand name in some respects. If that sounds crass I apologize but he is for a lot of people. I was interviewed by somebody in Sweden on the 10-year anniversary. I've done interviews with people who write about civil rights and others on my viewpoint and has anything changed or not in Wyoming. It's still out there. People remember it. Cathy Connolly will tell you that they are still doing the "Laramie Project" and people are still sending her emails and asking her how they should play her.

**MARK JUNGE:** Beth Loffreda won't even do interviews.

**BOB BECK:** No, no. For a while I wouldn't even do interviews because I was afraid every little kid who read that book was in high school. But it's great that they read it and great that they understood it. I said some things about the media that didn't set well with a couple of people but that's okay because I'm right. (They both laugh). And I'm not so sure it's better. As a matter of fact, I think the media is probably a little bit worse than it was even 13 years ago on this type of thing. When you still have crazy people thinking... you know... remember the woman who was the runaway bride they all thought she was killed or kidnapped and all that all she did was want to get out of her wedding and yet they had live coverage for 24 hours? That tells me how bad things are if that's the kind of stories were doing right now. That's one of the reasons I like public radio is because we don't do a lot of that. In fact, they were probably the last one to take a story on this. I remember calling them (NPR) and saying, "You know, I was just on MSNBC." And yet they were very cautious in thinking "Is this the kind of thing we want to do?" And eventually they were all over it but they did the same thing with O.J. Simpson. At first it was very limited coverage.

**MARK JUNGE:** Were you here during the block 14?

**BOB BECK:** I was not. I came in 1984.

**MARK JUNGE:** Were you a basic reporter in 1980 or did you come in as a news director?

**BOB BECK:** I actually came to Wyoming in 1983 I came in 1984 to Laramie and I was at KOWB/KCGY. I did sports play-by-play there and I was the news director. The first time I had ever been a news director in my life is when I came to Laramie. I've been the sports director at any other job I had ever had. And then I did both hats at KOWB for about four years. And then I was on my way to interview for about three jobs in Denver and I was certain I was going to get one of them. I mentioned that to the general manager here and he called me like three days later and said, "Can you come over here?" So I went over there and he said, "Did you hear that Frank Imhoff, the general manager, is leaving?" I said that yes he had told me. He said, "Well, we would be interested in hiring you and we know you're leaving." They really were pushing hard to keep me from going to Denver. So I went down to Denver and did one of my interviews. You could not do this today under the personnel rules but they basically hustled up the process and had me hired. I had to get some notice and I think I had a trip for two months later I was

here. I figured I'll just give it some time. At that time in 1988, I think the station had some fans but it wasn't that big of a deal. I remember saying to my wife, "I don't know if I should take this job because nobody actually listens to the station." She looked at me and said, "Well, you know you can make somebody listen. You could make it worth listening to." And I thought, "Touché." So if I was going to give it three years and see what was happening. I enjoyed teaching. That was 1988 and we are still here. I've joked that I'm not good enough to go anywhere else but in public radio you... When you've been somewhere certain amount of time you all make basically the same salary and I actually would be taking pay cuts if I left.

**MARK JUNGE:** You're just stuck, Bob.

**BOB BECK:** for at least a while.

**MARK JUNGE:** What was your first impression of Laramie? Did you come here because of the University?

**BOB BECK:** No, actually it was in Sheridan I went there for a gag. I needed a play-by-play job for a year and I wanted somewhere that I've never been before and I was waiting for my girlfriend to graduate from college. I actually just posted that on my Facebook page about six months ago and my friends, being as amusing as they are said, "She's still not graduated? Can you get her some advanced classes? Maybe she should stop changing her major." A lot of creative responses from people. But, I was going to wait for her and she was going to graduate the following May so I came in June. I said I would give a year and work out there. The very first place I stopped in Wyoming... I had been to Yellowstone before and it actually driven through Cheyenne before but I remember going through Gillette to stop for gas and I thought, "Boy, this place is desolate!" Then I said, "How many towns away..." This is how we talk in the city... "How many towns away is Sheridan?" The guy thought for a second and said, "I think it's two." Two and a half hours later, I make it to Sheridan. I did like Sheridan a lot. It was gorgeous. That drive down that interstate into Sheridan from the mountain pass you feel better right away. It was just an awfully isolated town for me at that time. It was kind of a close-knit community I thought. I did the community college play-by-play basketball games and they were number one in the country for a short time that year and that was fun.

**MARK JUNGE:** Was that when Bruce Hoffman was playing?

**BOB BECK:** Yes. They had a great team and six or seven of them play Division I basketball somewhere. Then I left there and I had a chance to come to Laramie after about nine months. By this time I gotten rid of the girlfriend and had somebody else. Laramie has always been a really good fit for me. I can't describe it.

**MARK JUNGE:** Are you a small town guy? I know you're raised in Chicago.

**BOB BECK:** No, I didn't think so. I don't think I could ever go smaller than this ever again but 35,000 is a small as you could ever get for me. I grew up in a town of about 50 to 60,000... a suburb west of Chicago--Wheaton. I always figured I'd live in a city at some point and I'm just shocked that that's not

what happened. At the same time, I love being in a university town. I don't think I could live in a town that wasn't a university town for very long--that's probably why I didn't make a very long in Sheridan. I could make it here because they've got the things I'm interested in--sports, amenities, things that go with the University... I got to teach for 20 years up until the end.

**MARK JUNGE:** Oh, you're not teaching anymore?

**BOB BECK:** No, I stopped. When we started doing "Open Spaces" --that format is so busy and we are just doing so many things that took a lot of my time up.

**MARK JUNGE:** That's a major production every week.

**BOB BECK:** Yes, it is... especially for four of us and sometimes only three of us. It's one of the reasons I gave it up and I don't miss it--but at the same time I enjoyed it over the 20 years. That's the thing--were doing great stuff! I've gotten to hire some of the great young reporters across the country who come here and I'm real happy with it! Sometimes you could use another restaurant but basically it's okay.

**MARK JUNGE:** One of the things I asked Larry Birleffi was "What are the things that you regret?" I think Larry was known as a "homer" in a way. Well, not in a way--he was a hometown guy. He said that he found it very difficult to be hard on the Cowboys. He said, "I wish I could've been a little tougher." Do you find that you ever get into a position where you have to back off because you love this place so much?

**BOB BECK:** No. In fact I think maybe it could be the other way if you see people that are a threat to the place or different than how I think the majority of people think then I kind of step it up on them a little bit--especially in the political world...

Announcer: This is been a presentation of the Wyoming State Archives. Produced by Sue Castaneda, the interviewer was Wyoming oral historian Mark Junge. It is funded by the Wyoming Cultural Trust Fund. Listen to the complete collection of interviews featured in the Matthew Shepard story by logging onto [wyoarchives.org](http://wyoarchives.org) --click on oral histories. You can also find complete transcripts. And you can learn more about the Matthew Shepard foundation@MatthewShepard.org. No part of this audio recording or transcript may be reproduced in full or in part without permission of the Wyoming State Archives.

*James Byrd, Jr. (May 2, 1949 – June 7, 1998) was an African-American who was murdered by three men, of whom at least two were white supremacists, in Jasper, Texas, on June 7, 1998. Shawn Berry, Lawrence Russell Brewer, and John King dragged Byrd for three miles behind a pick-up truck along an asphalt road. Byrd, who remained conscious throughout most of the ordeal, was killed when his body hit the edge of a culvert, severing his right arm and head. The murderers drove on for another mile before dumping his torso in front of an African-American cemetery in Jasper. Byrd's lynching-by-dragging gave impetus to passage of a Texas hate crimes law. It later led to the federal Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, commonly known as the Matthew Shepard Act, which passed on October 22, 2009, and which President Barack Obama signed into law on October 28, 2009.[2]*



*Lawrence Russell Brewer was executed by lethal injection for this crime by the state of Texas on September 21, 2011. King remains on Texas' death row while appeals are pending, while Berry was sentenced to life imprisonment.---Wikipedia*

*<sup>2</sup> Chasity Vera Pasley, 20, was sentenced to 15 months to two years in prison for being an accessory after the fact to first-degree murder of Matthew Shepard. Under Wyoming law she had faced a maximum sentence of three years in prison and a \$3,000 fine. The girlfriend of a man who pleaded guilty to killing gay college student Matthew Shepard has been sentenced to up to two years in prison for helping to cover up his involvement in the crime.. Pasley said she was sorry for helping to dispose of bloody clothing her boyfriend, Russell Henderson, wore when he beat Shepard to death last October. She admitted to helping to dispose of his bloody clothes and lying to police to provide him with a false alibi. It is not known whether she might have helped to save Shepard's life had she contacted authorities immediately on learning from Henderson that he had helped to "beat up some gay guy."*

*Authorities said Henderson and Aaron McKinney lured Shepard out of a bar before taking him to a remote area, hitting him over the head 18 times with the butt of a revolver, and leaving him for dead tied to a fence in near freezing temperatures. He died five days later.*

*Shepard's parents, Dennis and Judy Shepard, who lived in Saudi Arabia, did not attend the sentencing; but, in a statement, Judy Shepard asked Pasley why she failed to intervene while her son lay bleeding.*

*"I have to deal with it every day, forever, not knowing if I could have helped him or not", said Pasley. "I'm so sorry.... I'm disgusted with myself.... I can't live with what I've done." "I needed to face up to what I did," she said. "I can't bring him back. I'm sorry." But Albany County District Attorney Cal Rerucha told the court that Pasley had never before apologized for her role in the crime*

*Pasley's pre-sentence report recommended probation. But Wyoming District Judge Jeffrey Donnell said her complicity in helping Henderson while Shepard was unconscious prompted him to order a prison sentence of between 15 and 24 months. Although sentenced May 21, 199, she is released in November, 1999 after seeking a reduced sentence.—Askville by Amazon.com*

*<sup>3</sup>Kristen Price (18) –girlfriend of Aaron McKinney and mother of the couple's three-month-old son. Along with Pasley, the two girlfriends of the suspects provided alibis, dumped Henderson's clothing in a trash bin and his bloody shoes in a storage shed at the home of Pasley's mother. Shepards' wallet would later be discovered at McKinney's home wrapped in a dirty diaper in a garbage pail. On Nov. 10, 1999, Price pleads guilty to misdemeanor interference with a police officer. She is sentenced to 180 days in jail, and receives credit for 60 days already served. The rest of the sentence is suspended – Casper Star Tribune.*

*<sup>4</sup>Steven Vincent "Steve" Buscemi (Italian: boo-shem-ee; /bʊˈsɛmi/ in the actor's personal preference and habit; born December 13, 1957) is an American actor, writer and director. An associate member of the renowned experimental theater company The Wooster Group, Buscemi has starred and supported in successful Hollywood and indie films, including New York Stories, Mystery Train, Reservoir Dogs, Desperado, Con Air, Armageddon, The Grey Zone, Ghost World and Big Fish; and the HBO television series The Sopranos. He is also known for his appearances in many films by the Coen brothers: Miller's Crossing, Barton Fink, The Hudsucker Proxy, Fargo and The Big Lebowski. Since 2010, he has starred in the critically acclaimed series Boardwalk Empire, which earned him two Screen Actors Guild Awards, a Golden Globe, and two nominations for an Emmy Award. He made his directorial debut in 1996, with Trees Lounge, in which he also starred. Other works include Animal Factory (2000), Lonesome Jim (2005) and Interview (2007). He has also directed numerous episodes of television shows, including; Homicide: Life on the Street, The Sopranos, Oz, 30 Rock and Nurse Jackie.*

<sup>5</sup>James Edward "Jim" Geringer (born April 24, 1944) was the 30th Governor of Wyoming serving from January 2, 1995 – January 6, 2003. Geringer is a character in the play *The Laramie Project*, about the Matthew Shepard murder and trial, which was a major news event while he was Governor. He makes a statement in the play about being opposed to a hate crimes law, which President Bill Clinton strongly supported, as did Judy Shepard, mother of the murdered college student.

<sup>6</sup>Jason Marsden has served as executive director of the Matthew Shepard Foundation since July 1, 2009. He was born in St. James, Minnesota, a small farming town, and moved with his family to Sheridan, Wyoming during elementary school, graduating from Sheridan High in 1990 and Harvard College, with a degree in English, in 1994. He served as field director for the Wyoming Democratic Party Coordinated Campaign in 1994 before starting a seven-year career as a Casper Star-Tribune reporter, covering government, the environment, the energy industry and the state's congressional delegation both from Casper and later from Washington, D.C. Jason won the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Region 8 Environmental Achievement Award in 1998 for his coverage of the litigation and eventual cleanup of Casper's former Amoco Refinery site, and was twice honored by the Wyoming Wildlife Federation. During the aftermath of the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard, a personal friend, Jason came out publicly in the newspaper's pages and spoke frequently to journalism conferences and schools nationwide about coverage of hate crimes in local communities. In 2001, he became the founding executive director of Wyoming Conservation Voters and the WCV Education Fund, Wyoming's leading political and lobbying organization for wildlife and environmental conservation. He is a former member of the boards of directors of the Alliance for Historic Wyoming, the Equality State Policy Center, the Wyoming Wilderness Association and the Wyoming Chapter of the Sierra Club, and continues to lobby the Wyoming Legislature against ending the Equality State's recognition of valid same-sex marriages from other states and countries. Jason and his partner of 14 years, former Casper Mayor Guy Padgett, live in Denver, Colorado.

<sup>7</sup>"Remembering the Eight" refers to eight University of Wyoming cross country athletes who were killed in an automobile accident on U.S. Highway 287, approximately 17 miles south of Laramie near Tie Siding, on September 16, 2001. The driver of the other vehicle, Clint Haskins pleaded guilty to eight counts of aggravated vehicular homicide. A judge sentenced him to 14-20 years in prison on each count, to be served at the same time. According to the Wyoming Department of Corrections website, Haskins was paroled on February 12, 2012.

<sup>8</sup>Beth Loffreda, author of *"Losing Matt Shepard"* (published by Columbia University Press - October 15, 2001) is uniquely qualified to write this account. As a professor new to the state and a straight faculty advisor to the campus Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Association, she is both an insider and outsider to the events. She draws upon her own penetrating observations as well as dozens of interviews with students, townspeople, police officers, journalists, state politicians, activists, and gay and lesbian residents to make visible the knot of forces tied together by the fate of this young man. This book shows how the politics of sexuality -- perhaps now the most divisive issue in America's culture wars -- unfolds in a remote and sparsely populated area of the country. Loffreda brilliantly captures daily life since October 1998 in Laramie, Wyoming -- a community in a rural, poor, conservative, and breathtakingly beautiful state without a single gay bar or bookstore. Rather than focus only on Matt Shepard, she presents a full range of characters, including a panoply of locals (both gay and straight), the national gay activists who quickly descended on Laramie, the indefatigable homicide investigators, the often unreflective journalists of the national media, and even a cameo appearance by Peter, Paul, and Mary. Loffreda courses through a wide gambit of events: from the attempts by students and townspeople to rise above the anti-gay theatrics of defrocked minister Fred Phelps to the spontaneous, grassroots support for Matt at the university's homecoming parade, from the emotionally charged town council discussions about bias crimes legislation to the tireless efforts of the investigators to trace that grim night's trail of evidence. Charting these and many other events, *"Losing Matt*

*Shepard” not only recounts the typical responses to Matt's death but also the surprising stories of those whose lives were transformed but ignored in the media frenzy.*

<sup>9</sup>*Cathy Connolly (born 1956) is the first-ever openly gay member of the Wyoming State Legislature representing the state's 13th district in Albany County (Laramie). Connolly moved to Laramie in 1992 when she accepted a faculty position at the University of Wyoming. Until 2000, she served as an adjunct professor in the Women's Studies Program in the College of Arts and Sciences. In 2000, she became director of the program, a post she held until 2006. Since 2006, she has been a professor, following six years as an associate professor in the sociology department. Connolly has authored a number of articles on sexuality including "Out in the cowboy state: a look at lesbian and gay lives in Wyoming," published in the Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services in 2007. A native of Troy, New York, Connolly earned her B.S. from Buffalo State College. She then received three postgraduate degrees from the State University of New York at Buffalo: a Master of Arts (1989), a Juris Doctor (1991) and a PhD (1992). She has volunteered with the Wyoming Council for the Humanities and has served on the board of directors of Albany County SAFE Project and United Gays and Lesbians of Wyoming (now Wyoming Equality). She spent several years as a grant reviewer for the State Division of Victim Services and currently serves as a member of the State Department of Workforce Services' wage gap policy group. She is also a former chair of the parent board at Laramie's Whiting High School.*

<sup>10</sup>*Larry V. Birleffi (April 17, 1918 – September 27, 2008) was a Wyoming broadcaster known as the original "Voice of the University of Wyoming Cowboys", having announced all UW football and basketball games from 1947 to 1986. He helped to build the UW sports program in Laramie and was a vigorous promoter of its athletic teams. He also won a Bronze Star for his service during World War II.*

<sup>11</sup>*Cabrini–Green was a Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) public housing project located on Chicago's Near North Side. It was bordered by W.'s Scott Avenue on the north, North Larrabee Street on the east, Division Street on the south, and Halsted Street on the west. Today, only a set of row houses, built in the 1940s, still remain (south of Oak Street, north of Chicago Avenue, west of Hudson Avenue, and east of Larrabee Street). At its peak, Cabrini–Green was home to 15,000 people, living in mid- and high-rise apartment buildings totaling 3607 units. Over the years, gang violence and neglect created terrible living conditions for the residents, and the name "Cabrini–Green" became synonymous with the problems associated with public housing in the United States. The last of the buildings in Cabrini–Green was demolished in March 2011. The area has been undergoing redevelopment since the late 1990s, into a combination of high-rise buildings and row houses, with the stated goal of creating a mixed-income neighborhood, with some units reserved for public housing tenants. Controversy regarding the implementation of these plans has arisen. – Wikipedia*

<sup>12</sup>*Guy V. Padgett III (born 1977) is a former American municipal politician from Wyoming. A member of the Casper, Wyoming City Council from 2003 to 2009, he was mayor of Casper from 2005 to 2006. A Democrat, he came out as gay while on the city council in 2003, becoming the state's first openly gay elected official. Despite Wyoming's reputation for being politically conservative and the murder of Casper native Matthew Shepard in nearby Laramie in 1998, Padgett was unanimously elected mayor by the council in 2005. He reportedly enjoyed great popularity among his constituents, including support from prominent Republican Party politicians such as Alan K. Simpson. In addition he was, at 27, Casper's youngest mayor. Padgett was re-elected to the city council in 2006; he resigned his seat June 30, 2009, upon admission to a master's degree program at the University of Denver's Josef Korbel School of International Studies. -- Wikipedia*